



BOOK REVIEWS

Accounting for Transsexualism and Transhomosexuality, by Bryan Tully. Whiting & Birch Ltd, London, 1992, 292 pp. \$65.00 (clothbound).

In this book Bryan Tully, a chartered psychologist, traces the careers of over 200 'gender distressed' people who presented themselves at London's Gender Identity Clinic at Charing Cross Hospital. Rather than taking a narrow psychiatric approach to gender dysphoria, Tully elects to use a career perspective in tracing the evolution of his respondents' gender identity.

Tully uses the ethnogenic approach to data collection, that is he allows his respondents to be 'authorities on themselves' and account for their own behaviors. The individuals who come to the Gender Identity Clinic present often confused histories of homosexuality, transvestism and cross-dressing, heterosexuality, and feelings about 'being in the wrong body'. All the interviewees fell into the following cohorts: new beginners, already attending, post-reassignment surgery, special cases, and transhomosexuals (individuals who are attracted to homosexual persons of the opposite sex).

Most of the book consists of quotations from the respondents which illustrate various stages in their gender careers, including childhood experiences, problems in marriage, adult personality problems, and dissociative experiences. It is clear from this research that the path of gender dysphoria and the diagnosis of transsexualism are different for men and women. Most of the male patients experienced either physical or emotional problems in childhood which made them feel that they had failed as men. Some were physically handicapped while others were fearful or uninterested in typically male activities; thus, they came to believe that they were failed males. They later came to see that perhaps they were not really males at all but females. These men have a 'spoiled sense of gendered self'; so transgenderisation becomes a strategy for healing.

Most of the women patients had been tomboys as girls and experienced few problems until they reached adolescence. On reaching puberty parents, schools and the mass media all combined to push the girls toward gender conformity. They should focus on grooming, clothing, and attracting boys. These young girls come to hate anything

associated with the feminine and view transsexualism as a way of restoring themselves.

The evidence that Tully offers is convincing. In Western societies, as well as most of the world, the male gender role is more rigidly and narrowly defined than the female, and the penalties for failing as a male are greater than for the female. Many societies have created alternative genders for men and women who, for whatever reasons, are unable to succeed at the roles prescribed by the society. For example, some anthropologists have argued that berdache among the Plains Indians was an alternative for males who did not want to play the warrior role.

Again in western societies emphasis is placed on young girls grooming themselves for marriage and motherhood; it is no wonder that recent studies in the United States have shown the girls' self esteem drops when they enter high-school. Many girls resent the loss of freedom and spontaneity which adolescence entails. They don't want to grow up to become wives and mothers but, rather wish to be 'one of the boys'.

If Tully is on the right track, then the next step is to develop a model which will predict why some individuals come to see transsexualism as a solution to their dissatisfaction and unhappiness. The adoption of a new gender identity and all that entails, including reconstructive surgery, is a dramatic and fateful step. As Tully makes clear, transsexuals exhibit unusual tenacity in their efforts to change genders, obtain hormonal therapy and reconstructive surgery. Tully suggests that gender schema theory may help in understanding the processes by which individuals come to identify themselves as transsexuals.

This is a hard book to read; the stories are so wrenching, so heartbreaking. Why are some people burdened with lifelong unhappiness? I'm afraid I don't have the answer to that one.

There are a few problems with the bibliography, but over-all the book is well-researched and the literature review more than adequate.

Department of Sociology
Georgia State University
University Plaza
Atlanta, GA 30303, U.S.A.

Jackie Boles

Psychology on the Streets: Mental Health Practice with Homeless Persons, by Thomas L. Kuhlman. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1994, 223 pp. £28.95.

Homelessness has been one of the most important topics in the mental health literature of the past decade. This book gives a useful insight into this subject from an unusual angle. It uses a psychodynamic language to describe the process and outcome of author's psychotherapeutic work with homeless individuals. This direct experience was used to illustrate and understand the impact of homelessness and the issues involved in working with them.

The first chapter adopts a developmental approach to homelessness. It explores the stages and psychological consequences for a person to be homeless and describes the dynamics of working with such a person for mental health professionals. This chapter uses a combination of American

literature on the subject and author's own experience to argue its case. It avoids academic definitions of the homeless and uses "an ecological perspective (that) permits a culture to define itself" (p. 9). Chapter two is a review of literature on the new homelessness highlighting the differences from the old Skid Row homelessness. Mental health problems of the homeless are often construed as a product of de-institutionalisation of the chronic mentally ill. This chapter makes the point that these problems could be the result of social genesis (resulting from poverty and homelessness). The scope of these two chapters could have been widened if the author did not restrict himself to American literature on the subject. Chapter three titled 'Resistance' explores the lack of insight of homeless psychotics and the difficulty in engaging them in therapy. This chapter explains this resistance in the context of past experiences, current life style and the life-long beliefs of this population. Chapter four deals